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How envy drives consumerism on Instagram

Completed Research Paper

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Abstract

The use of Instagram as a social networking tool has transformed in recent years. The commerce friendly platform of this social networking site now facilitate for consumer-mediated purchasing, or also known as the social commerce. In this quantitative study, we examined how envy can influence consumerism on Instagram. Although envy is a universal emotion, there seems to be very little empirical research on how two forms of envy, benign and malicious envy affected purchasing behavior. Findings from this study suggested that an increase in willingness to pay (WTP) only happened in the case of benign envy. When people experienced benign envy, people are willing to pay more for a desirable product featured on Instagram posts that they found attractive. This study provokes new insights for psychology behaviour in Information Systems.

Keywords: Instagram, social commerce, envy, user behaviour

Introduction

The role of social networking sites to our life has been ever transforming. Researchers have found that some 73% of online adults are using social networking site of some kind (Constantinides, Romero et al, 2009). And about 43% of people aged 20-29 spend more than 10 hours a week on social media (Hanna et al, 2011). Considering the average time that social media users (whom are consumers at large) spend on social media, it is important to understand their psychology in order to be able to predict better customer behavior. One of the factors is the envy phenomenon, which arises largely from the comparison with others-which social media gives abundant of opportunities to.

Additionally, the power of photographs, which is said to elicit envy the most, makes up the most critical element of social media sites especially Instagram. While scholastic writing is yet to address Instagram, some prominent press has effectively examined its qualities and shortcomings. Examination has to a great extent focused on the way Instagram has given a stage to everybody to share their photography skills. Where sentiment varies is whether this is seen positively or negatively: some reviewers see this as a "democratization" of photography that engages beginners (Kindberg et al 2005; Ingram 2002; Rubel S, 2013), while others see a stream of low-quality, serving toward oneself pictures (Bevan K, 2012; Greenfield, R 2012; Grolleman 2013). On the other hand, Instagram's legacy can as of now be seen in the number of other photograph sharing platforms that have presented the utilization of Instagram style filters to their work (Facebook, Twitter and Flickr to name a couple of): "A photograph application that doesn't have filters will appear as prominent organizations without Twitter or Facebook links homepages; something will be missing" (Taylor, C 2012).

Instagram is the built off app for photo viewing and became a social media phenomenon by allowing people to transform ordinary photos into magazine-shoot images with fancy filters and then share them with others. The app grew from 80 million users in 2013 to 150 million users worldwide in 2014. Apparently, the use of Instagram as social networking tools have transformed in recent years. The

commerce friendly platforms of this social networking site now facilitate for consumer-mediated purchasing, or also known as the social commerce.

Learning more about how the psychology of envy can actually affect customer buying behavior on Instagram could help in realizing the full potential of social networking sites and lead advertisers to think of new ways of advertising and thereafter increase consumerism of a portrayed product.

In exploring the emotion of envy, this study build on previous marketing research, specifically by Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (van de Ven et al, 2009). In their 2011 paper "The Envy Premium in Product Evaluation," they found that benign envy leads people to pay a price premium for a product. They also find that malicious envy results in a person paying more for a product that is similar but different (i.e., same product category, but a different brand). Thus, we extend the previous research by experimenting envy in a social media context, which is the Instagram. The purpose of this study was therefore to analyze the envy occurrence which was induced scientifically to ascertain how it impacts customer buying behavior (willingness-to-pay) on Instagram. This study was done among the Instagrammers in Malaysia. Therefore, the literature review also discusses and brings together the concepts of envy, Instagram and marketing to answer the main question of this paper– Does envy increases the desire to purchase products featured on Instagram posts, and which type of envy do so ?

Envy

Parrot and Smith characterize envy as a feeling that happens when an individual needs something that another individual has (Parrott, W. G., & Smith, R. H. 1993). Envy incorporates two gatherings – the envier, the individual who envy somebody – and the envied, the individual who has the ownership or attribute that the envier wishes to have (D'Arms, J. 2009). Envy is seen as an unfavorable feeling (Spector, A. Z. 1989), a threatening feeling (Polman, E & Rachel LR 2012) and a power for inspiration (Foster, GM 1972). Envy can be relieved by the envier acquiring what was envied (Hill, S & David B, 2008) by moving desires far from the envied thing [10], or by detracting the pined for thing from the envied individual (Smith, R & Sung HK 2007). Envy is seen as a feeling that is not attractive; one that isn't pleasant for the desirous individual (van de Ven, N et al 2011).

Numerous firms use envy to expand interest and desire for their products. Among them, Google utilized an invitation-only system to their Gmail email message administration (Ulbrich, C 2004). Blackberry utilized envy to promote their cell phone by getting them in the hands of business (Young & Rubicam, 2006). Indeed Facebook began as a college restrictive informal community (Phillips & Sarah, 2007)

A typical theme in characterizing envy is social comparison. Envy develops when an individual contrasts unfavorably with another individual (Smith, RH & Sung Hee Kim 2007). Rodriquez Mosquera, Parrott, and Hurtado de Mendoza (2010) explain that envy is not expressed at the desired item, rather at specific individuals who has what the other individual wants. This makes a bond between the envied and also the envier that can be reached through positive or negative activities. Results identified with envy can be either positive or negative. These two types of envy, either benign or malicious, can figure out if or not the desirous feeling prompts motivating or destructive conduct. Polman and Ruttan (2012) depict benign envy as a positive experience; van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2009) found that benign envy inspires a longing to bring oneself up to the envied person. On the other hand, malicious envy has been portrayed as harmful and dangerous. Van de Ven expounds on this further by noting how malicious envy delivers the desire to bring harm upon the begrudged individual.

Benign Envy

Motivation to enhance oneself can make envy an attractive feeling to deduce. From a marketing point of view, benign envy can prompt increased consumerism, also known as "Keeping-up-with-the-Joneses" (van de Ven, Niels 2009; Spector, A. Z. 1989; Smith, RH & Sung HK 2007). Foster (1972) notes that this type of positive envy can prompt a stronger craving to attain what the envied individual has. Mussweiler, Ruter, and Epstude (2004) see benign envy as an approach to inspire an individual to greatness. Crusius and Mussweiler (2012) examine how benign envy can prompt competition in negotiations. Seeing how others get better outcomes in negotiations prompts the use of benign envy to change their practices with a specific end goal to accomplish the same results. Inspiration to desire, to accomplish what others need to raise their own standing, is one of the advantage of contrasting one's position relative with another individual (Tai et 2012).

Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters inspired emotions of benign envy, malicious envy, or admiration in respondents by having them recalling past circumstances or by perusing around a fake student (Van de Ven et al, 2011) emulating the envy elicitation, members were asked to finish a Remote Associates Task exercise. Those elicited with emotions of benign envy used more time on the exercise than those in the malicious or admiration envy environment. Envy was also utilized as a part of a trial setting to persuade members to pay more for envied items. They also found that members who were prepared with emotions of benign envy were ready to pay more (an "envy premium") for an item that an individual in a story situation. Those elicited malicious envy towards the imaginary individual who owned the item were more inclined to buy a contending brand of the same item.

Hence, the following hypothesis is drawn:

H1: Benign envy increases the willingness to pay for a desirable product on Instagram.

H2: Benign envy increases the willingness to pay only for a desirable product which elicited envy on Instagram and not for unrelated products.

Malicious Envy

Malicious envy is additionally a typical event in everyday circumstances. In a literature review on envy in the working environment, Tai, Narayanan, and McAllister found that envy is a normal feeling in office situations, referring to cases of office seat envy (pining for belonging of associates, be they seats, PC screens, or work area), work withdrawal, also non-attendance (Tai et al 2012). In the event that an individual feels envy towards another individual, they may decide to speak negatively of the envied individual by examining insufficiencies, which serves to both raise the respect toward oneself of the envier while degrading the envied individual.

An examination by (Smith RH et al, 2009) had respondents watch a tape that recounted a student who was either average or better than average on qualities that matters to students. In the initial viewing the introductory depiction of the student and finishing measures identified with envy, an epilog was demonstrated that told of this student being captured for stealing. Students prepared with the benign envy – seeing the superior students tape – were more prone to feel pleasure after viewing the epilog. Malicious envy additionally has negative outcomes for those being envied. Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2011) found that individuals who felt that they were generally envied would act all the more prosocially to the envious individual so as to diffuse the desirous circumstance. They put respondents in circumstances that would inspire malicious envy to them, such as providing for them a reward that another individual, a just-as-deserving mock respondent did not get (also being informed that the mock member knew regarding the reward), or getting a reward for a test score that was one point lower than the mock respondent's score (who did not get the reward however did think about the reward being given to the member). Respondents who got the reward came to the assumption that malicious envy would be experienced by the other mock member and they were more inclined to help the envier by giving time consuming advice or by serving to get things dropped by helping to pick up items dropped by the envier. Hence the following hypothesis is drawn:

H3: Malicious envy does not increase the willingness to pay for a product on Instagram

Envy and Consumerism

Given the empirical evidence that envy can be utilized to persuade individuals to activity and can prompt the consumerism phenomenon known as "keeping-up-with-the-Joneses", it is no big surprise that advertisers use envy as a tool for gaining brand and product exploitation and affecting purchase decisions. Young and Rubicam have termed client groups that are mainly affected by jealousy "aspirers"; these individuals are materialistic and are heavily impacted by social comparisons (Young and Rubicam, 2006, 2009). The video game industry likewise comprehends the critical part that envy plays in expanding sales. Simcity Social is an online city-building customer game, where players can see city areas created by their friends. In the event that the friend has a more developed city, the player may be influenced to use real cash to get things or unique supports to improve their city (Madigan, 2013). The game additionally permits players to cause harm to their friend's cities, which can be viewed as a demonstration of malicious envy.

Envy has been demonstrated to increase the cash that a consumer is willing to pay for the product or service. Utilizing individual reflection statements, videos, and mock stories, van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters found that members who felt benign envy were more inclined to pay more for products and services (2011a). Respondents were ready to buy a cell phone at a higher value and were more inclined to pay more for a service that gives internships to students when compelled to contrast and a superior mock student who had the item or administration they desired. The analysts likewise found that respondents who experienced malicious envy were more prone to buy an item that was comparable however not precisely the same as the item that evoked the envy. On a similar note, Shalev and Morwitz utilized social comparison to create a clarification for influencing behavior, CDSEER – comparison driven self-evaluation and restoration (2012). Participants were inspired to buy innovatively advanced items based on comparisons with low-financial status (SES) influencers. Respondents were acquainted with a low-SES purchaser through product reviews and were more prone to want a new product following feelings of envy identified with not having what the low-SES buyer possessed. Romani, Gistri, and Pace extended research on willingness to pay, conducting experiments to focus the impact of counterfeit goods on luxury brands (2012). As opposed to undervaluing the luxury brands, the vicinity of counterfeit goods demonstrated to raise buyer's readiness to pay for top-quality brands. These buyers were likewise more prone to appreciate the envious feeling offered to them for wearing luxury brands.

Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 below depicts a theoretical framework proposed in this research. This theoretical framework introduces and describes the variables which were explained in the earlier section. It is also helpful to the researcher in understanding the research problem underlying this study. On the left diagram is the three independent variables that will make up the study. These are the conditions which has manipulated the study. Benign envy and malicious envy is experimentally induced in order to test the dependent variable which is willing-to-pay (WTP). As an additional measure for validity and reliability, a control condition is also tested. In this control condition, no envy was elicited.

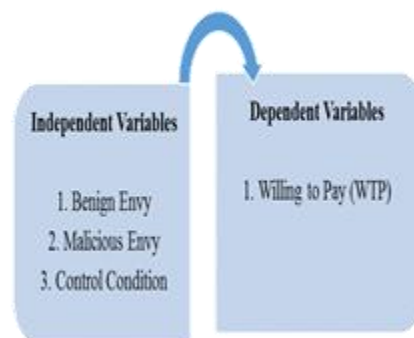


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Conducting short scenarios to determine levels of willingness to pay for envied goods on Instagram, how advertising and communicating envy to customers on Instagram may increase purchase intentions, and learning whether envy on Instagram can enhance persuasive attempts, can expand our knowledge of the topic in the broader context of marketing, social media and consumer behavior.

Research Method

We approached Instagram users in Malaysia both online and face to face to participate in the study. 306 Instagram users were chosen using convenience sampling method. Every Instagram user who was willing to participate received a questionnaire (online questionnaire in the case of online participants) with information on the study. The research population in this study comprised of all users of

Instagram in Malaysia. In order to participate in the study, the participants had to be an Instagram user with a registered Instagram account, a Malaysian citizen, and had to willingly participate in the study. The questionnaire was based on the review of literature and other research instruments based on previous studies.

Structure of questionnaire

In this study, the questionnaire designed combined closed and open ended questions. There are three sections in this study, namely Section A, B, and C. However before the beginning of Section A, a short scenario which was to induce either benign, malicious or control condition were added. A sample image that depicts the intended Instagram post was also included.

For instance, a scenario for the malicious envy condition is as in Figure 2. After reading the scenario, participants were asked to answer the following sections. Section A includes 8 questions which extensively used Likert scale to measure the variables. This section is to understand what participants generally thought about the product. Therefore they were asked questions such as how much they would like to have the product portrayed in the scenario (desire) and also how deserving they thought of the person portrayed. Other questions include to understand how much benign envy and malicious envy they experienced towards the subject (a friend) on the Instagram post. Section B consisted of three open ended questions which asked participants whether they owned any iPhone 6+ themselves and their willingness to pay for the product in the scenario. Whereas section C covers the socio demographic profile of the respondents.

Imagine that you come upon this posting on your Instagram news feed. One of your friend that you follow has posted this and mentioned that she just bought it yesterday. In a matter of minutes, her post has gained more than 50 likes and numerous comments. The likers and commenters are also your mutual friends. Many wow-ed the new iPhone 6Plus which only recently was launched in Malaysia and tagged at a premium price. The new iPhone 6Plus comes with a stunning design and sizeable body. While she posted on several outstanding features of the phone, you start to feel a little jealous. You notice that you admire your fellow friend.

When asked how she obtained the Iphone 6Plus, your Instagram friend proudly mentioned that the Iphone6Plus was just "one of those gifts" that her husband usually buys for her.

The iPhone 6Plus is retailed at RM2399, for a 16GB version.

Scenario 1



Figure 2: Sample of Scenario

Findings

Socio Demographic

Based on the Figure 3, 208 participants (69.3%) were females. This could be because females make up the majority of Instagram users in Malaysia. Females could generally easily relate themselves to the scenario in the research as usually females are the one who does online purchasing. Thus, more female respondents are justifiable to respond in this survey. Another justification is that the

population in the place where we chose to collect data has more females or females were more considerate and willing to respond in the study.

Participants were randomly assigned to be in a benign envy ($n = 100$), a malicious envy ($n = 100$), or a control condition ($n = 100$). Six participants were excluded from the analysis, as they owned an iPhone 6+.

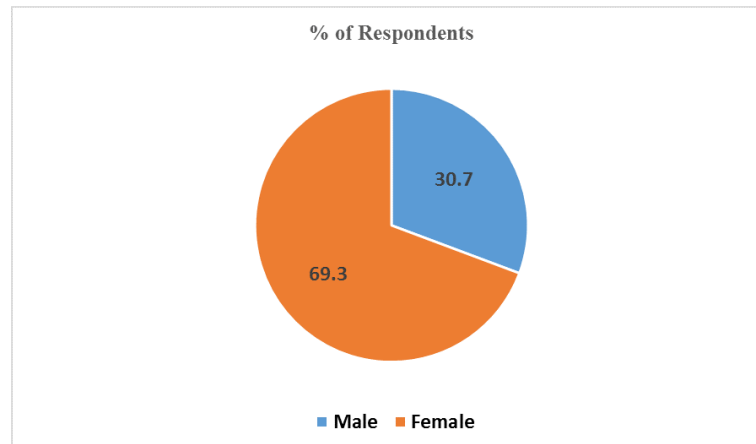


Figure 3: Respondent Gender

The highest number of respondents were in the range of 24-29 years old (45%) followed by the 18-23 years old range which makes up the 21% of the respondents, and the 30-35 years old range which makes up another 21% of total respondents. 10.3% of the respondents are from the age 36-41 and 3.7% of them are 42 years and above. It can be explained from the above data that the younger generation from 24-29 years old are the highest numbers of social media users, particularly Instagram due to its features which appeals this generation. Most of them in this category group are generally higher education students and working young-adult, whom are empowered in buying decisions.

Variables

In this research, participants were provided with a scenario which included an Instagram post of a brand new iPhone 6+ by an individual. They would then answered several self-administered questions. In the control condition setting, participants were asked to imagine that the individual which posted on Instagram was their friend. Several notable features of the iPhone 6+ were also included. In the benign envy and malicious envy condition, there was an additional short story concerning how the individual had acquired his/her phone that was not included in the control condition. In the benign envy condition, the individual on the Instagram post responded that he/she had worked hard to earn the money to buy the iPhone, making its possession more deserved and thus likely to elicit benign envy. In the malicious envy condition, the fellow individual responded that “this was one of those things that my husband usually buys for me,” making its possession less deserved and thus likely to elicit malicious envy. Participants in all the conditions were told that the retail price of an iPhone 6+ is typically about RM2399. Although the control condition could potentially elicit envy, we predict that envy would be most painful when the information regarding the acquisition of the phone was added, because the comparison to the other becomes more salient (Smith, RH & Sung, HK 2007; Tesser, A & James EC (1998).

After reading the scenario, participants answered a number of questions, which among these were the dependent variables of the study. In the first part, participants indicated how much they liked to have the iPhone 6+ and how much effort they were willing to put into obtaining one (both combined into an “attractive to self” measure, $r_s(298) = 0.563$, $p \leq 0.001$, Table 1). We expected those in the benign envy condition to find the product to be more attractive than those in the control and the malicious envy condition. To explore whether the benignly envious only like the product more themselves, or whether they would also think that others would like the product more, we also asked participants to indicate how much they thought others would like to have the iPhone, and how much effort others would be willing to put into obtaining one (combined into an “attractive to others” measure, $r_s(300) = 0.539$, $p \leq 0.001$, Table 2). In this way, we could explore whether envy only signals to oneself that

the product is liked, or whether it generalizes to an overall expectancy that others would like the product as well.

			Self_ Like	Self_ Effort
Spearman's rho	Self_ Like	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.563**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	300	298
	Self_ Effort	Correlation Coefficient	.563**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	298	298

Table 1: Spearman's correlation for 'attractive to self' variable

In the second part, participants were asked to indicate the maximum amount of money they would be willing to pay for a number of products: an iPhone 6+, a BlackBerry, a 4GB USB memory stick and a weekend in Langkawi including flight and hotel. These were presented in a random order to participants. We expected that the benignly envy only leads to an increased desire for the envied product, and malicious envy does not increase the desire to buy the same product. Participants were also asked whether they thought it was deserved that the other person had the iPhone 6+, how much benign envy they experienced towards the person in the scenario, how much malicious envy they experienced toward him/her, and how much they liked the other person.

			Others_ Like	Others_ Effort
Spearman's rho	Others_ Like	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.539**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	300	300
	Others_ Effort	Correlation Coefficient	.539**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	300	300

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Spearman's correlation for 'attractive to others' variable

ANOVA Test

A one-way ANOVA with the condition manipulation as between subjects variable and the attractiveness to self and to others as a within subjects variable revealed that participants in all the condition thought that others found an iPhone more attractive than they did themselves ($M_{\text{self}} = 3.19$, $SD = 1.142$; $M_{\text{others}} = 3.79$, $SD = 0.756$). As Table 3 below shows, participants in the benign envy condition actually found the iPhone to be more attractive ($M_{\text{self}} = 3.44$, $SD = 1.012$; $M_{\text{others}} = 4.02$, $SD = 0.668$) than those in the control and malicious envy condition. This result is important because if respondents do not think that the product (an iPhone 6+) is attractive, then they may not be envious of the possession of the product.

Condition	Attractive to Self			Attractive to Other			WTP iPhone 6+		
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Benign	3.44	99	1.012	4.02	100	.668	2418.98	100	667.055
Malicious	3.20	100	1.071	3.62	100	.804	1786.96	100	854.390
Control	2.92	99	1.276	3.72	100	.736	1601.28	100	646.415
Total	3.19	298	1.142	3.79	300	.756	1935.74	300	806.410

Table 3: Attractive ratings

Secondly, Table 4 below shows that the manipulation was effective. Participants in the malicious envy condition found the advantage of the other more undeserved than those in the control and benign envy conditions. The perceived deservingness in the benign envy was marginally higher than in the control condition ($M_{\text{deserving}} = 3.88$, $SD = 1.066$, LSD , [least significant difference] post hoc, $p = 0.761$). More importantly, those in the malicious envy condition experienced more malicious envy than those in the other conditions, and those in the benign envy condition experienced benign envy the most.

	Condition								
	Benign			Malicious			Control		
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Deservingness	3.88	100	1.066	3.48	100	.893	3.84	99	.923
Malicious Envy	1.84	100	1.012	2.90	100	1.115	2.08	100	1.032
Benign Envy	2.93	100	1.148	2.23	100	1.004	2.59	100	1.248
Liking of Other	3.59	100	.922	3.35	100	1.029	3.30	100	1.068

Table 4: Manipulative Ratings

Figure 4 presents the WTP for the iPhone per condition. Participants in the benign envy condition were willing to pay RM 817.70 more than those in the control condition (LSD post hoc, $p \leq 0.001$) and RM 632.02 more than those in the malicious envy condition (LSD post hoc, $p \leq 0.001$).

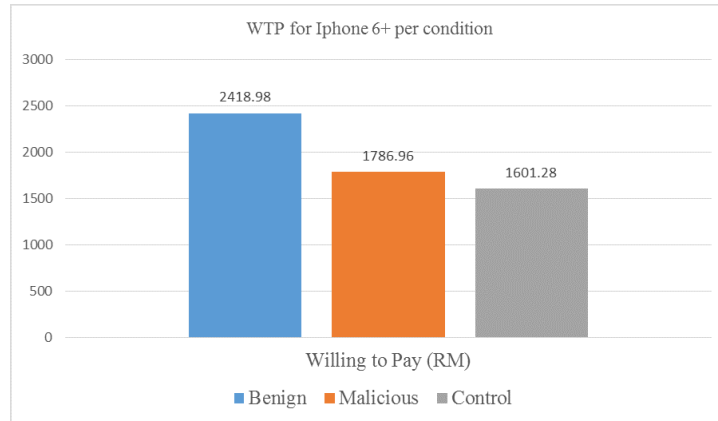


Figure 4 Bar Chart of WTP for iPhone 6+ per condition

A one-way ANOVA, with the manipulation as the independent variable and WTP for iPhone as a within-subject dependent variable, found ($F(2, 297) = 34.611, p \leq 0.001$, Table 5). There was a statistically significant difference between the conditions as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(2, 297) = 34.611, p \leq 0.001$). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that the amount users were willing to pay was statistically significantly lower in the malicious envy condition ($1786.96 \pm RM 854.39, p \leq 0.001$) and control condition ($1601.28 \pm RM 646.42, p \leq 0.001$) compared to the benign envy condition ($2418.98 \pm RM 667.055$). There were no statistically significant difference in the amount willing to pay between the malicious envy condition and control condition ($p = 0.171$, Table 6). Hence, this analysis supports the statement of H1 and H3 as below:

H1: Benign envy increases the willingness to pay for a desirable product on Instagram.

H3: Malicious envy does not increase the willingness to pay for a product on Instagram.

Results from the ANOVA and Tukey's post hoc test is presented below.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	36751987.760	2	18375993.880	34.611	.000
Within Groups	157686887.960	297	530932.283		
Total	194438875.720	299			

Table 5: ANOVA to test on the significant difference between the conditions

(I) Condition	(J) Condition	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Benign	Malicious	32.020*	103.047	.000	389.29	874.75
	Control	817.700*	103.047	.000	574.97	1060.43
Malicious	Benign	-632.020*	103.047	.000	-874.75	-389.29

	Control	185.680	103.047	.171	-57.05	428.41
Control	Benign	-817.700*	103.047	.000	-1060.43	-574.97
	Malicious	-185.680	103.047	.171	-428.41	57.05
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Table 6: Tukey post hoc between conditions

Finally, we checked whether the manipulation had an effect on what participants were willing to pay for goods unrelated to the envy-eliciting episode. Tentatively, no differences between conditions (benign, malicious and control) were found for the amount willing to pay for a Blackberry, a USB stick, and a weekend to Langkawi ($p > 0.05$). Benign envy thus only led to an increased desire for the envied product, while malicious envy do not lead to increased desire for the envied product. Hence the hypothesis H2 is supported: Benign envy increases the willingness to pay only for a desirable product which elicited envy on Instagram and not for unrelated products.

Discussion

From the findings of our research, participants in the benign envy condition found the iPhone 6+ (product that elicited the envy on Instagram) to be attractive to not only them, but also to other Instagram users. Tentatively, the findings also highlight that participants in the benign envy condition were willing to pay RM 817.70 more than those in the control condition and RM 632.02 more than those in the malicious envy condition. Indeed, participants elicited with benign envy were willing-to-pay RM 19.98 more than the given retail price of the iPhone 6+ at RM 2399.

In answering the question of how envy drives consumerism, we can say that firstly, consistently across the experiment, it was found that benign envy can make people willing to pay a higher amount for the envy elicited product. We also found that customers were generally unwilling to pay more for unrelated products; (which no envy was elicited upon) a Blackberry, a 8GB USB stick, a weekend in Langkawi including hotel and flight. Being benignly envy is a frustrating experience which arises due to our comparison to another individual who has obtained the desirable product and deserved it. The resulting experience from this envy is that an action is triggered in order to relieve the envious feeling, either by bridging the gap between oneself and others, by trying to possess the good for oneself; or raising the willingness to pay for that product.

Secondly if indeed people are willing to pay a higher amount (and buys more) when they are benignly envious after looking at Instagram posts, then envy can increase consumerism of the portrayed product. The more people post desirous products that they possess, the more envious other Instagram users might become, and therefore buy more as well. This will increase the consumerism of a particular product or brand featured on an Instagram post. What's more interesting is the continuity of the cycle, with benign envy as the factor that emotionally multiplies consumption and consumerism.

Apart from that, some key take away from the research is that participants who were maliciously envy did not want to pay more for the envy-elicited product (lower WTP for an iPhone 6+ in the malicious condition). This finding is in line with previous researches on distancing and divergence by Berger and Heath (1985) and White and Dahl (2006). In the previous research, it was concluded that customers who would like to separate themselves from others can do so by either avoiding or devaluing certain options. In relation to the present research, maliciously envious individuals are not willing to pay for the envy elicited product and try to differentiate themselves from the owner by devaluing the product. Therefore the findings in the current study support this initial idea. However while the impact of benign envy to consumerism is straightforward, the impact of malicious envy is rather difficult to predict. Previous study by (2001) for example found that participants were willing to pay some amount of money if that will lead to the destruction of more amount of money from the other envied person.

The present findings also show that deservingness of the envied other is a key element in deciding whether people are actually influenced by the ownership of others. If ownership of a desired product by others is deemed as deserved, then people will likely be benignly envious and want the product

more. If the desired product is felt undeserved then people are likely to focus on other products. Therefore, we can say that factors that contribute to increase the deservingness of a desired product will be able to increase the sales of the product.

Since we have concluded that benign envy has important effects on consumerism, it is interesting to note that not all products are able to elicit envy. Authors Bearden and Etzel (1982) explains that two precondition to elicit envy are found in the research on reference group effect and conspicuous consumption. However, both this element were more towards luxury goods than necessity, as some exclusivity is needed. Furthermore, products should also be obviously visible or audible; since goods that are not noticed cannot be envied. The Young and Rubicam advertising agency mentioned that envy eliciting products are products that get noticed by everyone, not everyday items, polarizing and somewhat mysterious items.

Limitations

This research has certain limitation which may spur further studies on the same area. Firstly, it is the fact that participants were only asked how much they were willing to pay for the product they envied on Instagram without providing the means for them to really buy the product. Therefore, although we may find that participants were willing to pay more than the retail price of an iPhone 6+, it remains unclear whether these results can be expected when consumers really pay the price. A further study may explore on what happens on Instagram when people need to follow up on the amount they were willing to pay for the envy elicited product, which may directly best explain consumerism on Instagram.

Conclusions

The current research have demonstrated that people who experience benign envy after looking at Instagram posts featuring a desired product are willing to pay more for the envy elicited product that someone else possess. However, when people experience malicious envy, they are not willing to pay more for these products. Instead they may try to differentiate themselves by trying to devalue the product. A key determining factor on whether benign or malicious envy is elicited is the perceived deservingness of the situation. When consumers perceived the ownership of the desirable product is deserved, then benign envy is likely and the sales of the product may increase. However, when consumers perceived the ownership of the product as undeserved, then malicious envy is more likely and thus may not have any impact on sales. Therefore in trying to maximize the potential of envy to boost up sales through Instagram posts, it is important to be aware of the effects of benign and malicious envy.

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